

## OBITUARY

### Keith Futter (1962-2008)

Keith Futter was born on 19th January 1962, the eldest of two children, and grew up at Fulbourn, on the outskirts of Cambridge. He failed his 11-plus exams at school, but went on to pass his A levels and attended the University of Sheffield from 1980 to 1983, where he obtained a B.Sc (Hons) Zoology. This was followed by a Ph.D at the University of Nottingham from 1983 to 1989 on 'Age and sex differences in the foraging behaviour of Lapwings, *Vanellus vanellus* in mixed species flocks'. While completing his studies, he also worked as a biological surveyor as part of a small team completing a detailed habitat survey of the City of Derby for the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust during 1987 and 1988. He subsequently published *The Flora of Derby* with Peter Raynes (Futter & Raynes, 1989).



**Fig. 1.** Keith Futter, on holiday in Norfolk, summer 2007. Photograph: Susan Futter.

In 1990 he moved to Scotland to lead the Dumbarton Habitat Survey Team and organised a comprehensive habitat survey of Dumbarton District for the Scottish Wildlife Trust. From 1991 to 1994 he worked for Scottish Natural Heritage, compiling Nature Conservation Strategies for seven environmental improvement projects associated with Strathclyde Regional Council's 'Greening the Glasgow Conurbation Initiative'. He moved to Fife for a year in 1995 to work as a project Officer for Dunfermline District Council, co-ordinating the compilation of a

management plan, the designation and launch of the Torry Bay Local Nature Reserve. In 1997 he completed a course on the internet and designing basic websites, and in August 1997 married Susan Ebdon, a biological surveyor whom he had first met when they worked together on the Dumbarton habitat survey. Around this time he helped Susan, together with Geoff Hancock, undertake a survey of the Odonata of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Shortly afterwards both he and Susan began working for Tesco Personal Finance, initially on a temporary basis, but the posts then became permanent.

Keith had a wide range of interests. A keen gardener, he was a member of the Scottish Rock Garden Club and the British Cactus and Succulent Society. He grew many native plants from seed he collected locally to be used as part of conservation projects. Some of these plants are now growing at Brucehill Cliffs, Dumbarton; Mugdock Country Park, and at a butterfly garden in West Kilbride, attracting butterflies and other insects. He was always keen to promote the importance and benefits of ragwort for wildlife, in places where it posed no danger to horses and would argue strongly with those people who insisted it should always be eradicated and exterminated entirely, regardless of its location.

He was a talented artist and a good photographer. His line drawings appeared on the covers of several issues of Butterfly Conservation's local branch newsletter, *On the Spot* (Fig. 2), his photographs were used in various promotional leaflets and booklets.



**Fig. 2.** Scotch argus butterflies. Line drawing by Keith Futter, 1994.

Many people would be surprised to know that Keith was also interested in steam locomotives and particularly liked aircraft, often going to air shows. His mother used to deal in antiques on a small scale, collecting and selling silver, ceramics etc. This may have influenced Keith, as he too was a keen collector – he collected minerals, shells and many other items of natural history interest.

Keith was a prominent member of the Helensburgh Green Belt Group. In the early 1990s he recognised the importance of Blackhill Mire on the outskirts of the town for Lepidoptera. He showed that it was probably the best site in the Greater Glasgow area for the Green Hairstreak butterfly and made major efforts to protect the site from proposed developments by Helensburgh Golf Club.

He only joined the Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS) in 2005, but was a fairly regular contributor to the Glasgow Naturalist, writing short notes, often with his wife Susan, on entomological and botanical subjects (Futter & Futter, 1998a, b, 2000, 2001; Futter, 2001) and contributed numerous records to the annual Scottish Insect records reports (Hancock, 2000, 2001, 2002). He published articles in Urban Wildlife News (Futter, 1992a, 1992b), various items in Butterfly Conservation's local branch newsletter, (e.g. Futter, 1993) and also produced many unpublished reports detailing district-wide habitat surveys (Futter, 1990, 1992, 1994).

An active member of Butterfly Conservation, he was vice-chairman and Conservation officer of the Glasgow & South West Scotland Branch from 1993 -1995, and the branch's Regional Action Plan Officer from 2000.

He was a very keen biological recorder. He sent over 1,500 butterfly records to Butterfly Conservation between 1992 and 2007. He ran a moth trap and recorded all the wildlife in and around his Dumbarton garden, producing lots of records, which he passed onto the Glasgow Museums Biological Records Centre.

He was the driving force behind the *Butterflies of South West Scotland*, (Futter *et al.*, 2006). He brought all the contributors together, organised meetings, and managed to get funding from a wide variety of sources. Not only did he write well over half of the text, he also designed the layout and liaised with the publisher. Without him the book probably wouldn't have happened. Together with Richard Sutcliffe, he gave a presentation on the book to the GNHS on 14 November 2006.

In 2002 Keith was diagnosed with melanoma. He went through several operations and had periods of remission, but unfortunately the cancer returned in 2007. Even in the last few months of his life, he was determined to make sure that some of the issues he was passionate about would continue after he was gone.

He was keen that the small blue should be considered for re-introduction to the Ayrshire coast as part of the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan. He was also determined to get more recognition for his local wildlife site, Brucehill Cliffs, Dumbarton. As late as December 2007, Keith was having discussions with the Dumbartonshire Biodiversity Officer about this and other local sites. Brucehill Cliffs is likely to be designated as West Dumbarton's first Local Nature Reserve in the near future.

Keith died on 2 Feb 2008. An all-round naturalist, his expertise and wide knowledge will be greatly missed by the many organisations he was involved with, and Scottish natural history has lost a major supporter.

My sincere thanks to Susan Futter for providing information about Keith's early life.

**Richard Sutcliffe**

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